

# Namibian Marine Phosphate launches job registration drive


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BY: [MARLENY ARNOLDI](#)  
CREAMER MEDIA ONLINE WRITER

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While it awaits a court ruling to declare the validity of its mining licence for the Sandpiper marine phosphate project off the Namibian coast, Namibian Marine Phosphate (NMP) has decided to embark on a job registration drive.

Once the project gets the final go-ahead for development, with the ruling expected at the latest in March next year, NMP expects to employ more than 600 Namibians directly and indirectly for construction and operations in Walvis Bay, as well as create opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The drive affords Namibians the opportunity to register their interest to be considered for various jobs and roles that will be created when the Sandpiper project development starts.

The objective of the job registration exercise will be to compile a database of prospective job seekers who would be suitable candidates for employment in the future for various full-time, part-time and casual positions, including low-skilled labour such as security and driving to high-skilled engineering and management positions.

Some roles on offer include heavy equipment drivers, administration, electrical and mechanical maintenance, fitters, boiler makers, geologists, metallurgists, surveyors, foremen and supervisors.

Following the registration of interest, NMP will conduct a series of interactive workshops and seminars with the registrants to provide relevant information on NMP's proposed operations and the related roles.

NMP CEO **Chris Jordinson** remains confident of a favourable judgment on a review application brought by three fishing associations and a commercial fishing company, which was heard in the Namibian High Court on July 7.

In the meantime, Jordinson believes the job registration drive to be a welcome initiative that Namibia needs, given its struggling economy and global uncertainty amid Covid-19.

“We want to get on the front foot, since we do not know what the availability of skills and labour will be. By doing a job registration drive, we can understand the availability of people in Namibia, while educating the registrants on NMP, its environmental aspects and about the development process of the project,” he notes.

Mining is the largest contributor to gross domestic product in Namibia, with one job in the mining industry creating up to seven other jobs along the value chain. NMP hopes to have supported 5 000 jobs during the Sandpiper project's construction and operational period.

## **PROJECT IN PROGRESS**

NMP's Sandpiper project is about 60 km off the coast of Namibia and 120 km south-west of Walvis Bay. The licence covers a 2 233 km<sup>2</sup> area in water depths of 180 m to 300 m.

NMP is 85%-owned by Omani-registered entity Mawarid Mining and Havana Investments, a Namibian registered entity.

The project has reserves of 132-million tons, grading 20.41% phosphorous pentoxide and mineral resources of 1.69-billion tons, grading 18.94% phosphorous pentoxide.

A 2013 definitive feasibility study (DFS) on Sandpiper envisioned a three-million-ton-a-year phosphate rock concentrate project, grading about 28%, over an initial mine life of 20 years. The company plans to contract an international company to dredge seafloor sediments with a large-capacity trailing suction hopper dredge.

Autonomous and remote-controlled underwater vehicles can be used to assist in positioning ships and to obtain environmental monitoring information over long periods, without the need for expensive support vessels.

The capital cost to first production is estimated at about \$360-million, or N\$5.4-billion.

Following a final investment decision and securing financing for the project, the construction and commissioning period will be 24 months.

Jordinson says phosphate rock has experienced a lull in pricing in recent years, with the price varying between \$88/t and \$100/t, compared with an average price of \$120/t in 2012; however, demand from farmers and phosphoric acid producers for the mineral remains solid.

## **LEGAL BACKGROUND**

An environmental clearance certificate for the project was issued in September 2016 after completing public consultation, a formal application for environmental clearance in 2012, an updated DFS in 2013 and a N\$14-million comprehensive environmental-impact verification study in 2014.

Since then, despite a consensus of authoritative expert opinion that the proposed scale of activities would have no significant impact on the marine ecosystem or the Namibian commercial fishing industry, project development has been delayed by various legal actions initiated in November 2016, which are based largely on scientifically unsupported environmental objections.

As a consequence of an appeal lodged in 2016, the project's environmental clearance certificate was set aside in June 2018 by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism to complete a further six-month period of consultation and evaluation with the public, the fishing industry, and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources.

The process was completed in December 2018 but awarding of the certificate remains pending a decision from the Environmental Commissioner.

In 2019, NMP responded to certain recommendations put to the Environmental Commissioner by the appointed external reviewers of the further consultation process conducted in 2018.

NMP completed and submitted two additional specialist environmental studies to the Environmental Commissioner, as well as additional detailed information for consideration in the award of the environmental clearance certificate.

On July 7, the legal challenge on the validity of NMP's mining licence (ML170) by the Confederation of Namibian Fishery Associations and three others was heard in the High Court of Namibia, and NMP remains confident of a successful outcome. Jordinson says the associations can appeal the court's ruling, which would bring about further delays to the project; however, they would have to have good grounds for such an appeal.

Meanwhile, the significant infrastructural and commercial developments at the Port of Walvis Bay have allowed for an adjustment to the project development plans and, specifically, the location of the proposed landing and onshore processing facilities.

The revised development is situated within or close to the current planned industrial development areas within Walvis Bay.

The dredger will be able to enter the Port of Walvis Bay, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gateway bulk terminal allows for offloading the dredged material and accessing the shore-based processing facilities, as well as shiploading and exporting the final product.

With regard to the proposed revised project layout, NMP says an application has been submitted and an in-principle approval has been received from Namport for the allocation of a land site within the SADC Gateway development for construction of the buffer pond facility to receive the offloaded bulk cargo (phosphate ore).

NMP has also submitted an application to the municipality of Walvis Bay for an allocation of land adjacent to the northern border of the SADC Gateway development for construction of the processing plant.

Further, NMP has applied to the Ministry of Works and Transport for an allocation of land on the northern side of the heavy industrial development zone for the establishment of a tailing's management facility and related servitude.

Site allocation for the revised project layout will be subject to completion of the statutory environmental clearance certificate application process, which is expected to take 12 months to complete. 

EDITED BY: CHANEL DE BRUYN  
CREAMER MEDIA SENIOR DEPUTY EDITOR ONLINE

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